



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990  
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 3, 2004

The Honorable Alex Deccio, Chair  
Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee  
213A Newhouse Building  
Post Office Box 40414  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0414

Dear Senator Deccio,

We are writing to you on behalf of the State Board of Health and the Department of Health in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 8419, which is scheduled for public hearing before your committee today. SCR 8419 creates a joint select task force to consider and address several important factors that are likely to reduce disparities in health care and health status in Washington.

The State Board of Health's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. What is more, health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- The number and percentage of ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented when compared to the overall population of the State.

A Task Force on Community Preventive Services, supported by CDC and a variety of private and public partners, has found strong evidence that comprehensive early childhood development programs are effective in preparing children for learning and fostering healthy development (please see [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)). This implies disparities in health are firmly established in childhood.

There is no shortage of reports describing disparities in health status and health care, and recommendations for addressing these disparities. The Board and the Department of Health applaud your and the other bill sponsors' leadership in proposing a joint select task force that would use this information to address opportunities to reduce health disparities in our state's increasingly diverse communities. This is a significant step toward healthier and more productive Washington.

Sincerely,

Vickie Ybarra, R.N., M.P.H.  
Member, WSBOH Health Disparities Committee

Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer

cc: Senator Rosa Franklin  
Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee Members  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Mich'l Prentice Needham, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Steve Meyer, Department of Health